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AUTHOR Hazeur, Felicie B.
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ABSTRACT

In determining whether black freshmen are ready for college, the author examines the social-psychological realities from which they emerge. A poor concept of efficient utilization of time and organization, coupled with a weak academic self-discipline perpetuates a dangerous beginning for the black freshman. Parental lack of exposure to college does little to reinforce motivation, sense of direction, and self-concept. The document discusses ways of coping with the black student's problems in higher education and defines separation as a failure to prepare him for the culture in which he must function. The author also condemns one-way integration as a source of personal maladjustment for many black students and as a reinforcer of the dichotomy in American life. She concludes that only when we accept and appreciate mutual peculiarities and differences will our efforts take on new meaning and become viable exercise of professionalism. (Author/LAA)

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SYMPOSIUM ON "DEALING WITH TYPES OF TEST BIASES WHEN BLACK STUDENTS ARE CONCERNED" ——— THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE: HOW DO WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

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Submitted to American Personnel and Guidance Association

By: Félicie B. Hazeur
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This presentation, "THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE.....," is a reaction to the paper delivered by Walter R. Jacobs of CEEB, Southern Regional Office, concerning test bias and Black students.

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It's May, the seniors are busy preparing for the ceremonies, the pomp and circumstance, the parties, the "You are about to embark..." speeches, and the farewells. For the great many who will continue on to join the college society, the summer to come is filled with preparation, anticipation and exhilaration.

It's now September, amidst the clamoring of suitcases, chaos, and the awesome realization that <u>this is college</u>, our seniors of last May are now members of the elite class of beings known as freshmen. They are the ones whom we of academe have decided belong in college. They are the ones who, for twelve years, have been programed, trained, and initiated to reach this final segment of intellectual life.

But are they really prepared? This question has been tossed around, argued over, written about, and analyzed ever since the institution of higher education found birth in this country.

It is my purpose today to explore and react to this question, basing my assertions primarily on experiences and observations I have encountered during the course of my career in education; as student and as administrator.

The gap between high school and college is a colossal

one; and as regards minority students, especially blacks, it has taken on new dimension. Let us examine the characteristics of a great number of black students as they emerge in September of the freshman year: probably more than any other single characteristic associated with these students is their unrealistic assessment of college; they envision college as an extension of high school. The "I'll exert myself a little and get by" attitude is notorously prevalent among many black students. Coupled with a poor concept of efficient utilization of time and organization of daily routine, the black freshman's weak academic self-discipline perpetuates a dangerous beginning.

Perhaps there are those of you who feel that these characteristics exist among freshmen, regardless of ethnic background. To some extent this is true, but bear in mind that many black students, across the country, have not been properly motivated toward academe during the high school years. Black high schools boast great extra-curricula activities, but more often than not disciplinary problems, associated with ill-staffed faculties and inadequate facilities, create situations where able teachers and administrators are reduced to functioning as "watch-dogs" and "baby sitters." If this contention seems strong, I urge you to visit the inner-city and/or predominately black

schools in your respective communities, where you are likely to find armed guards and/or locked doors. In addition to this sad reality, consider that a greater proportion of black college freshmen are first generation college, and in many cases, first generation high school, than are not. In terms of the student's self-concept of goals and objectives, sense of direction, lack of exposure to and encounter with college on the part of his parents does little, if anything, to reinforce motivation and self-awareness that are necessarily born and nurtured in the home. When there is a lack of these elements in the home, there is little chance that positive motivational forces toward education occur outside the classroom. The theory of "I want you to have the chance I didn't have" does not necessarily perpetuate itself positively in black homes; too many other problems and everyday crises transcend the black parent's dream for his child. In a word, the plight of the majority of black families in America stiffles the luxury of being "future oriented." Black parents are oft times concerned with feeding, clothing and protecting their off spring from factors synonymous with decaying ghetto communities.

Since we are all cognizant of this ugly fact of American life, let us consider, for a moment, what I commonly refer to as the "psychological paralysis" of many black

parents: the inability to even perceive, much less consider the opportunities for upward mobility among their children. Perhaps this explains the tragic lack of parental support many black students receive as they pursue the "guaranteed" rights of equal educational opportunity. Those of you who have experienced the "You think you something now" attitude perpetuated by some parents toward their conscientious children are aware of the tremendous effect such an attitude may have on the students' desire for success.

My contentions thus far are generalities, of course, and do not pertain to <u>all</u> black people. What I have attempted to do is cite the social and psychological realities from which many, if not most, black students emerge. I believe that in order to deal with bias when black students are concerned, we must first and foremost be aware of the unique situations that characterize them.

Using Mr. Jacobs' theme "Separation? Integration? Liberation?, I address myself to segments of his presentation that I feel merit scrunity and, hopefully, will enable us to realize viable means of dealing with the problem of bias as regards tests, education, and black students in general.

Under the "Separation" theme, Mr. Jacobs has asserted

that "black" tests for black people and "white" test for white people be used as a means of realizing cultural identity. He contends that advocates of the separation theme totally reject white culture, which is considered tainted and polluted. Mr. Jacobs further stated that this method would reduce construct bias, thus greatly promoting extinction of social bias, which is thought to exist because of differences in society as manifested between ethnic groups. The contention is that "only a diluted version of operational bias would remain as a challenge under the separation theme."

Although advocates of separation envision a separate state for black people, I question the validity and specifically, the feasibility of said state. On what are black students to be tested if so called "white culture" is rejected totally? Even the language spoken by most black Americans is a direct adaptation of white culture, as is the basic life style as compared to that of black societies outside this country. Are we to assume then, that black students are to be tested in Swahili or some other language synonymous with black types? Are we to assume that the subject matter on which black students are to be tested is some entity that is peculiar to black people? The utilization of the "Chitterling test" perhaps, which is a

deliberate attempt to measure identity with the black subculture of America? I am baffled over the assumption that black people in America could function completely autonomously; the very fact that politically, economically and numerically black people in America are not autonomous negates the feasibility of such a state. For whether or not we like it, black people in this country are Americanized, and although this ethnic group has enjoyed only the slightest proportion of the so-called "American Way", it is never the less the only reality experienced. To subject black students to a type of measurement aimed at realizing "black cultural" identity is not to adequately prepare them for the culture in which most must function; ultimately that being American culture, or if you will, white culture.

As regards the "Integration" theme, specifically one-way integration, Mr. Jacobs has asserted that the use of indices of high school ability and background in the regression equation to predict the "white standard" of excellence in college is a means of dealing with predictive bias. Just as is making the "white standard objective more reachable through remediation and/or academic selection of black students who would probably be successful without remediation."

In order to "cope" with the problem of the black student's inadequate academic preparation, the college initiates

remediation as a means of helping that student reach an adequate level of performance, thus assuring successful competition, or the use of academic selectivity of "outstanding" black students who are able, from all apparent academic indications, to "cut the mustard." Although the principle of remediation and academic selectivity is in itself noble and just, the hard reality is that this principle does not and cannot work as a standard practice.

High school personnel are often anxious to recommend brilliant black students for matriculation at certain colleges because of academic achievement. On the college level, recruitment and admissions personnel are often anxious to recruit students who are academically outstanding, or other students whom the college feels could survive through the use of remediation. Often times the real reason for recruiting these students, whichever catagory they fall, is to meet numerical quotas.

The falacy of recommending and accepting black students into colleges, under the one-way integration theme, is that the primary elements for which success and failure depend are too often ignored and/or unrealized. To assume that college success is contingent on removing basic academic inadequacies through remediation, or preventing the necessity for remediation through selectivity, does not necessarily

deal with the primary criteria for adjustment, that being personal adjustment--social and psychological.

The personal maladjustment of many black students is perhaps the basis of the problems regarding one-way integration in higher education. Let us consider several situations which often foster this maladjustment: to take a black student from dire poverty and send him "Ivy-League", where he encounters a roommate whose father owns General Motors, and expect him to relate, is to ignore his personal adjustment.

To send a black student on scholarship to a college that meets his academic expenses, but fails to realize that this student is affected when he does not have a dime to buy a coke, but must watch his peers go off to Aspen to ski during the winter break, is to ignore his personal adjustment.

To send a black student to a college that provides wall-to-wall carpeted, air-conditioned dormitories for his comfort, but fails to realize that that very student lay awake at night thinking of his little brothers and sisters who are likely to be bitten by rats in the paper tar shack he calls home, is to ignore his personal adjustment.

To send a black student to a highly competitive college, is to ignore his personal adjustment, considering that most black high schools cannot measure up to their white counter-

pacts in terms of preparation; to be at the top of a predominately black high school class does not necessarily mean that that student will fare favorably with his white counterpart. The realization that the black student is not as good academically as he thought may be dangerously traumatic.

One-way integration reinforces the dicotomy of American life, and perhaps this is why black students on the white campus have, at varying times, tried to burn the place down. Of course, my examples are generalities, and to some extent extreme, but I believe they illustrate the grave differences in our society that do exist, and do affect the behavior, development and well-being of many black students. It is conceded that <u>all</u> white colleges are not wealthy, and that <u>all</u> black students are not dire poverty cases, but the point is that too often these factors do exist; whether in reality or theory the structural objectives of white schools are based on the fundamental premise of the "American Dream."

It should be remembered that even the middle-class black student does not always view his white college experience as an "adventure," but often sees it as a frustrating and disappointing encounter; those blacks who would gravitate toward the white standard per se often find that, no matter how hard they try, white America is not about to

stop reminding them that they are black, be it overtly or subtly.

So where are we now? Separation and one-way integration, in themselves, fail to eliminate the ubiquitous variables involved. Two-way integration, then? Let us consider. To assume that America is ready to "thoroughly incorporate the idea that blacks and whites, indeed, mutually respect each other as equals," as pointed out by Mr. Jacobs as a definition of two-way integration is in itself ludicrous. One need not deeply ponder the state of present day America to be cognizant of the sad reality of prejudice, hatred, ignorance and fear that is rampant.

The very notion that after three hundred plus years of oppression, black people are suddenly "equal" is absurd; America has not afforded blacks the opportunity for equality, in a literal sense. To blatantly assume so is to ignore the problems and, in a word, cop-out. Perhaps a start to fostering two-way integration, which could ultimately insure liberation and justice for all Americans, has been suggested by Mr. Jacobs' contention that, as regards higher education, "one brings into focus information that reveals <u>all</u> levels of human behavior," and further that "one constantly contrasts the opportunities a student had to produce a score and the corresponding usages to which that score will be put."

This theory transcends mere testing; to be realistic about a student's needs and the posture of a specific institution in terms of dealing with those needs is, perhaps, a beginning for mutual growth.

To recognize "everyday experiences" as valid criteria for developmental measurement is again a tool for mutual growth; the fact that black people have, and continue to survive, given the hardships that plague so many, is in itself educational, if not outright phenomenal.

Mr. Jacobs has pointed out that efforts of these types require "skill, hard work and money." But if we are to deal with the problem of black students and duelism in America generally, we must first be honestly committed to this end.

Honesty is perhaps the key ingredient needed to begin the process of full growth and equality in American life, and specifically, American education. When we become honest about the problems of black students, the failures, variables and the like, solutions may begin to emerge. We cannot allow our selfish interests or personal values to obscure the hard facts relating to individual needs and interests. When we begin to accept and appreciate mutual pecularities and differences, then perhaps, our efforts and energies will take on new meaning, and hopefully, become viable exercises of professionalism.